

# Composting— Nature's Recycling

## It's not hard...just let nature do the work for you

Composting is a great way to recycle your kitchen waste and yard trimmings, reduce your trash output and generate a free and rich soil conditioner.

### How do I get started?

First decide if you want a compost pile (just a small area of the yard where you mix your ingredients) or a fabricated compost bin or tumbler. Generally, a bin is recommended to discourage pests and make it easier to access the finished compost.

There are many commercially produced compost bins, or you can build your own from numerous plans available online. Three feet by three feet is considered the ideal bin size.

### Ok, I have a bin, now what?

Start by collecting kitchen scraps: carrot and potato peelings, wilted lettuce, apple cores, coffee grounds and filters, and other scraps. Keep a small container with a lid under your sink for easy use while you are cooking.

Start adding leaves, glass clippings, small twigs and so on to your outdoor bin. When your kitchen container is full, empty it into your compost bin. Mix the material, add some water, and cover it with a layer of brown, carbon-rich matter (like dead leaves) to speed its decomposition and discourage pests.

Composting is not an exact science. If you combine roughly equal parts of nitrogen-rich and carbon-rich materials your compost should be off to a good start.

### Interested in?

- ☐ Reducing trash
- ☐ Saving money
- ☐ Reducing chemical use
- ☐ Growing healthy, vibrant plants
- ☐ Protecting the groundwater



### Sound too much like chemistry class?

Don't worry—all you have to know about nitrogen and carbon is that Nitrogen-rich materials are **nice and green**, such as freshly cut leaves and grass. Carbon-rich materials are **crunchy**, such as dried fall leaves and plant material, shredded paper (not glossy).

### How do I know it's ready?

Finished compost is dark brown or black and crumbly with a rich, earthy smell. Using compost in the late summer or fall is ideal, so you can make room in your bin for fall leaves.

### Compost is great to use:

- ✓ as a soil additive
- ✓ as a moisture-holding mulch around trees and on flower and vegetable beds
- ✓ as a lawn dressing
- ✓ as a mix with potting soil

## Compost

### Recipe for great compost:

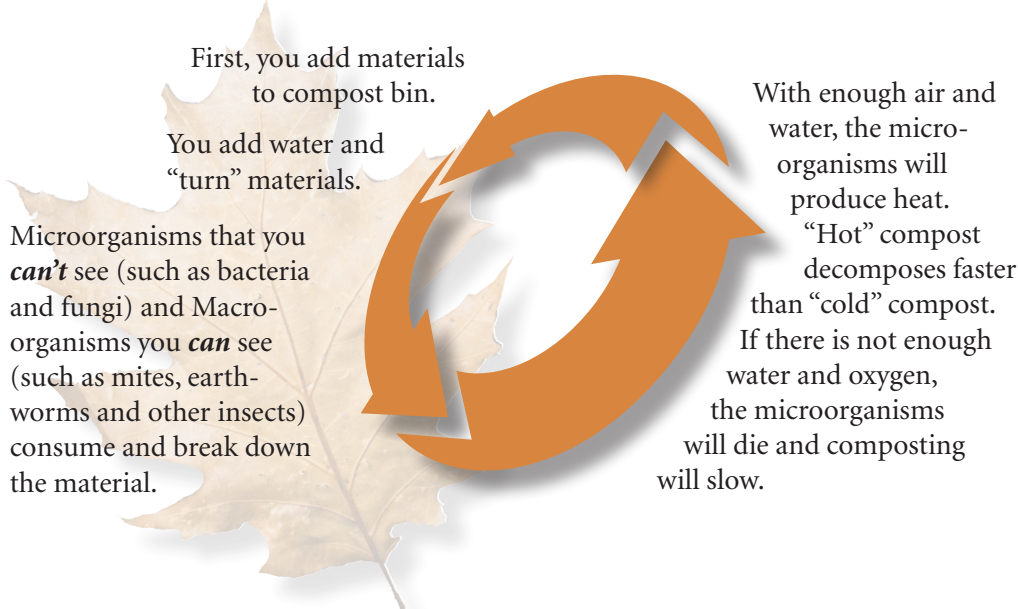
- Add roughly equal amounts of **high-nitrogen items** (such as freshly cut leaves and grass, kitchen scraps) and **carbon-rich materials** (such as dried fall leaves and plant material, shredded paper)
- Combine in a pile, pre-made compost bin or tumbler
- Add some water and mix
- Make sure your pile has enough air and water
- Mix occasionally and allow to decompose for 6-12 months



Things you <b>CAN</b> add to your compost	Things <b>NOT</b> to add to your compost
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ vegetable and fruit peelings</li> <li>✓ tea bags, tea leaves and coffee grounds</li> <li>✓ crushed egg shells</li> <li>✓ dead flowers and leaves</li> <li>✓ grass clippings</li> <li>✓ wood chips</li> <li>✓ lawn grass from mowing</li> <li>✓ shredded paper (not glossy)</li> <li>✓ straw and hay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ all meat products and bones</li> <li>✗ bread (attracts pests)</li> <li>✗ cooked food (attracts pests)</li> <li>✗ grease and oil</li> <li>✗ dog or cat waste</li> <li>✗ big or chunky wood material</li> <li>✗ lime</li> <li>✗ weeds or invasive plants</li> <li>✗ ash from coal or charcoal</li> <li>✗ anything not biodegradable</li> </ul>
<p>Remember, you want about half nitrogen-rich items and half carbon-rich items. Nitrogen-rich materials are typically soft and green (such as freshly cut leaves and grass). Carbon-rich materials are brown, (such as dried fall leaves and small branches).</p>	



## HOW DOES COMPOSTING WORK?



For more information on composting and recycling, visit the following sites.

- [austinrecycles.com/compost.htm](http://austinrecycles.com/compost.htm)
- [epa.gov/epawaste/conserve/rrr/composting/index.htm](http://epa.gov/epawaste/conserve/rrr/composting/index.htm)
- [tceq.state.tx.us/assistance/nav/composting.html](http://tceq.state.tx.us/assistance/nav/composting.html)
- [compostguide.com](http://compostguide.com)

## Getting the hang of it...

Here are some common composting problems and how to fix them.

Symptom	Problem	Solution
Bad odor	Not enough air	Turn/mix the compost
Pile smells ok, but is not decomposing	Not enough water	Moisten pile and turn material
Liquid is leaking out bottom of the bin	Too much water. Materials should be damp, like a wrung-out sponge	Add more of the dry carbon-rich materials and turn material



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